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Daily Highlights

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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ UNPROFOR says cease-fire agreement is being stretched to limit in Bosnia and Herzegovina; peace-keepers confront Bosnian Serbs at Sarajevo checkpoint; Croatian Serbs deny UNCRO Force Commander clearance to land in Sector North.

+ United Nations issues urgent humanitarian alert on worsening situation of displaced persons in Chechnya region.

+ Burundi says its army is in control of situation in north of country; criticizes international media for portraying society drifting towards disaster.

+ Special Representative Beye expresses optimism about Angolan peace process despite logistical delays; UNITA President affirms support for Lusaka Protocol.

+ 1995 Review and Extension Conference of Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to be held at Headquarters from 17 April to 12 May.

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The cease-fire agreement concluded by the parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina is being "stretched to the limit", with some 7,000 firing incidents reported in the last 24 hours, a United Nations spokesman said today. The agreement is due to expire at the end of the month. There has been an increase in military activity along the confrontation line in north-eastern Bosnia and outside Sarajevo. United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) peace-keepers fired warning shots at Bosnian Serb positions after the Bosnian Serbs targeted the strategic logistics route across Mount Igman.

In another development, UNPROFOR has deployed 40 French peace-keepers and four armoured personnel carriers at a Bosnian Serb checkpoint, known as Sierra Four, on the Sarajevo airport road. According to the spokesman, Force Commander Lieutenant-General Rupert Smith decided to confront the Bosnian Serbs over their behaviour at the checkpoint after they detained two Swiss journalists on Tuesday.

For information media—not an official record

Meanwhile, Croatian Serbs denied the Force Commander of the United Nations Confidence Restoration Operation in Croatia (UNCRO), General Bernard Janvier, clearance to land in Sector North, while he was en route to Bihac on an official visit. The Croatian Serbs have made general threats against United Nations air traffic in the UNCRO mission area.

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The Department of Humanitarian Affairs has issued an urgent alert regarding the situation of internally displaced persons fleeing the fighting in Chechnya. United Nations agencies and other humanitarian organizations operating in Daghestan have reported a sharp increase in the flow of internally displaced persons fleeing Chechnya. Some 30,000 to 50,000 Chechens are currently moving towards the Daghestani border, and up to 3,000 are crossing daily.

Citing the disappointing response to a flash appeal issued in February and a consolidated inter-agency appeal issued in March, the Department urged donor countries to take immediate action. By the end of March, only $7.9 million of the $25 million sought to fund humanitarian assistance had been received. Donors should provide additional support to the humanitarian assistance programmes of agencies and organizations operating in the affected republics of the Russian Federation.

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The situation in northern Burundi is absolutely under control, but the international media have presented a picture of a "dichotomized" society drifting towards disaster, the country's Permanent Representative to the United Nations said today. Tharcisse Ntakibirora told correspondents at Headquarters that Burundi had experienced inter-communal violence and ethnic killings since 1993, but was not facing genocide.

Burundi's army was fighting a war against a Hutu militia assisted by elements of the former Rwandan army and Rwandan militia members from across the Zairean border, the Permanent Representative said. The Government also had to contend with Tutsi extremists. It had attempted to quell militia violence by sending in the police and the gendarmerie, but had deployed the army after they failed. The Hutu militia had used people as human shields and some had been killed in the cross-fire, but the army was not deliberately targeting innocent civilians. The army was not perfect, but it had put those guilty of crimes in jail.

Mr. Ntakibibrora likened the media's coverage of the situation in Burundi to putting oil on a fire. The country had faced successive crises since 1993 and had solved them, and the army was now solving a new crisis. Meanwhile, political progress was being made. A national debate beginning in July would deal with the protection of minorities, and would lead to the drafting of a new constitution.

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Logistical problems are causing some delay in the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol, but Special Representative Alioune Blondin Beye remains optimistic about the overall peace process in Angola, according to a United Nations spokesman. Despite violations of the Protocol, the Special Representative expects the next phase of the troop disengagement to be completed by the 10 April deadline.

The President of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), Jonas Savimbi, today affirmed his support for the Protocol and urged his followers to embrace the peace process. He did so at a meeting attended by a Government delegation, the Special Commission, and representatives of the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM III).

In an interview with United Nations Radio, the Force Commander of UNAVEM III, General Chris Garuba, described today's meeting and Dr. Savimbi's statement as a major milestone in the peace process. He noted that the UNITA President had not been present at the signing of the Lusaka Protocol and had not previously attended a joint meeting such as today's. He added that Dr. Savimbi was expected to meet soon with Angolan President Jose Eduardo dos Santos, possibly before the end of the month.

Meanwhile, after a considerable delay, a United Nations technical team has been inspecting the airfield outside the port of Lobito, which is intended to be the principal entry point for UNAVEM III troops and equipment. The spokesman expressed the hope that the Angolan Government would promptly make the necessary arrangements to secure the facility for United Nations use.

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The 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) will be held at Headquarters from 17 April to 12 May. The Conference will review the implementation of the Treaty, which entered into force in 1970, and decide on its extension.

The NPT is a landmark international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, and to further the goal of general and complete disarmament. It also promotes cooperation in the field of peaceful technology, while thwarting the threat of nuclear weapons. The NPT has been ratified by 175 countries -- more than any other arms limitation and disarmament agreement. Along with other measures in the nuclear non-proliferation regime, it has succeeded in stemming the proliferation of nuclear weapons and in reducing existing arsenals.

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